

A clean sweep

The research keeping
bacteria from your door





Welcome to issue 23 of *BBK*. As well as celebrating the first year of Birkbeck Stratford on page 3, we raise a glass to Computer Science in its 50th year on page 8.

Law graduate Genet Amare also has a lot to celebrate after going into labour during her final exam last year. She tells her story on page 16. Meanwhile we also hear from Ann Jackson, Mayor of Tower Hamlets and Philosophy student, on page 15. In 'A Law Unto Themselves' on page 19, Professor Gordon Lynch says history will almost certainly judge Archbishop Rowan Williams more kindly than many of his recent critics have done, while Dr Jane Nicklin tells how she jumped at the chance of being a consultant microbiologist on Channel Four's *How Clean is Your House?* in the cover story on page 20.

As ever, we look forward to receiving your comments about *BBK*.

Catherine Stevens

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THE QUEEN'S
ANNIVERSARY PRIZES
FOR HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION



Birkbeck is a world-class research and teaching institution, a vibrant centre of academic excellence and London's only specialist provider of evening higher education. Its academic reputation also attracts many traditional, full-time postgraduate and research degree students.

Partnership to find pain treatments

Crystallography teams up with Pfizer to cement world-class standing

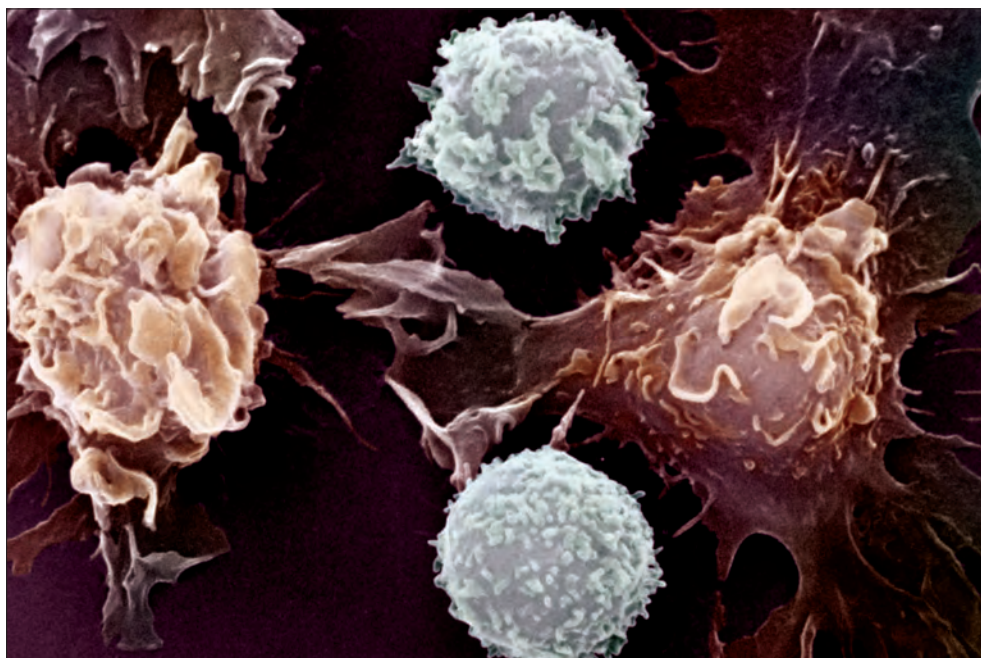
In a bid to discover potential new treatments for pain, multi-national drug company Pfizer and Icagen are collaborating with Birkbeck's Professor Bonnie Ann Wallace and her research team in the School of Crystallography. Utilising the combined expertise of the participants to advance the field, the three partners will study the structure of sodium ion channels – molecular 'gates' that regulate the signals of nerve cells.

"We will look at these ion channels and how they can interact with different drug compounds to see if we can alter how they act," says Professor Wallace. "We hope to gain a greater understanding of their structure and function and how we can influence their behaviour that leads to pain disorders and diseases."

"We are very pleased that Pfizer and Icagen have initiated a collaboration with Professor Wallace," adds P Kay Wagoner, President and CEO of Icagen. "She is one of the world leaders in the structural biology of ion channels and has particular expertise in structural studies of sodium channels."

More proof of the School's glittering research reputation came with the news that cancer treatment specialists have based a team at Birkbeck to study the structure of proteins to aid the discovery of anti-cancer drugs. Cancer Research Technology (CRT) has recruited Andrew Turnbull to lead the new unit at the School of Crystallography. Dr Turnbull previously lead a team in the X-ray crystallography group at the Structural Genomics Consortium at Oxford University. The organisation, owned by Cancer Research UK, aims to maximise the benefits of publicly funded research to cancer patients.

Dr Nicholas Keep, Dean of the



Faculty of Science at Birkbeck, says: "Crystallography is an essential part of the drug discovery and optimisation process. We are delighted that CRT has recognised our expertise in this field."

Tony Raynham, Head of Medicinal Chemistry at CRT, adds: "Locating our crystallographers at Birkbeck means we can take advantage of their world-class facilities."

Meanwhile, the Association of Commonwealth Universities has made available up to eight scholarships for students from Commonwealth countries to study Birkbeck's MSc in Structural Molecular Biology web course. The scholarships will cover 100% of the course fees.

On average, the School takes eight PhD students each year. Tim Stone, a current PhD student in Professor Wallace's group, was attracted by the school's research status. "The School of Crystallography is internationally recognised for its excellence and I feel privileged to be associated with it," he says.

Above: Cancer cells
(Science Source/
Science Photo Library)

Tim was a successful high school physics teacher but, after 10 years, he felt the need for a change. "A PhD at Birkbeck suited me perfectly. My colleagues have diverse backgrounds; some have had previous careers, others came straight from their undergraduate degree, and we all encompass a range of scientific disciplines. This creates a stimulating work environment."

Lastly, the Head of the School, Professor Gabriel Waksman, has been elected to the European Molecular Biology Organization (EMBO). Professor Waksman – also Director of the Birkbeck/UCL Institute of Molecular Biology – is one of 50 EMBO members selected annually on the basis of scientific excellence. Joining this community of leading scientists is a tribute to his significant contribution to the advancement of science.

For information about the School of Crystallography, visit www.cryst.bbk.ac.uk



MOON WATCH

The world's space agencies should consider lunar-based observatories, maintained by people based on the moon, as a viable method for expanding our understanding of the universe. That is the message Dr Ian Crawford, School of Earth Sciences, delivered at a special meeting of the Royal Astronomical Society in December. The discussion, 'Astronomy from the Moon', was organised jointly by Birkbeck and the Open University, bringing together leading space scientists from Europe and the US.

"Space agencies are again planning to send humans to the moon so it's a good time to examine the scientific benefits of lunar exploration," says Dr Crawford. "The lunar far-side is probably the best location in the solar system for radio astronomy, being permanently hidden from interference from earth."

Ian is also heavily involved in a number of nearer-term lunar science missions. He chairs the Science Team for C1XS, an orbital X-Ray spectrometer that will fly on India's first mission to the moon later this year. "Birkbeck is in the thick of this current renaissance in lunar science, both in the UK and internationally," he says.

Sure Start strengths and weaknesses

Birkbeck research leads to changes in government child poverty scheme

A new Birkbeck book provides insight into how the government's Sure Start Local Programmes towards ending child poverty were expected to function and how they actually operated, in terms of their strengths, weaknesses, costs and early detected effects on children, families and communities.

The National Evaluation of Sure Start: Does Area-based Early Intervention Work? was published in November 2007, edited by researchers at Birkbeck's Institute for the Study of Children, Families and Social Issues.

"The government invested a lot of money in Sure Start Local Programmes," says co-editor, Professor Jay Belsky, Director of the Institute and Research Director of the evaluation. "It wanted to know whether the scheme was realising

its goals and how it could be improved, so the government commissioned our very large national evaluation; many of these results are presented in the book."

Another co-editor, Professor Edward Melhuish, Executive Director of the evaluation, adds: "The government has used our results to reformulate select features of Sure Start, moving from the original neighbourhood focus to a Children's Centre focus, with clearer guidance on the nature of services." This policy redirection was also influenced by the results of the government-funded Effective Provision of Preschool Education (EPPE) project that Professor Melhuish is involved in.

Professor Belsky further points out that while the new volume nicely summarises how Sure Start

Local Programmes operated before changes were implemented (i.e. up to 2006), a new report prepared by Professors Melhuish and Belsky has been published by the government, based on the group's continued investigation of the impact of Sure Start Local Programmes – including Children's Centres – on children and families. This report, which came out on 4 March, reveals marked changes in the impact of Sure Start programmes from those reported in the book.

Professor Jacqueline Barnes, the third co-editor of the volume, is working on a separate government-commissioned evaluation of the Family-Nurse Partnership, developed in the US, which focuses on young first-time mothers receiving regular home visits by specialist nurses.



A year in the life of Birkbeck Stratford

Significant milestone reached as the first students attend classes in east London

Thursday 20 September 2007 marked a significant milestone in the College's history when the first students turned up for class in east London and Birkbeck Stratford was born. With over 600 enrolments in the 2007–2008 academic year, the project is already exceeding expectations. The Master of Birkbeck, Professor Latchman, said: "The Stratford project has been a challenging undertaking, involving many staff across the College. I am delighted that our first year has proved so successful. Six hundred enrolments is very impressive, and particularly pleasing is the 20% increase in east London students coming to our Bloomsbury campus. With this excellent start I know that Birkbeck Stratford will go from strength to strength."

The project had two major launches last spring. The first, at the Goldsmiths Hall, involved potential donors and the business community. The second, at Stratford Old Town Hall, hosted education organisations, community groups, the media and east London strategic partners.

A high-profile, bright green, marketing campaign with the strapline 'part-time university, full-strength qualifications' captured our unique offering of high-quality, research-intensive, evening education. The campaign rolled out across east London on buses and billboards, and via door drops and in the local media. It encouraged more than 4000 enquiries about Birkbeck in Stratford, including 3000 requests for a Stratford prospectus. About 1000 visitors attended the open evenings in June and September; from research it is clear that this campaign was influential in encouraging people to take the next step towards study.

Birkbeck is grateful to the many partners in east London which



have supported staff over the past year, in particular the project's major partner, the University of East London (UEL). Birkbeck has valued the local expertise of UEL, as well as the classroom space at its Stratford campus. Newham College of Further Education and NewVic Sixth Form College have offered significant support. In the Theatre Royal Stratford East, Birkbeck found a kindred spirit, and the London Borough of Newham, the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation and the Stratford Renaissance Partnership have also been enormously supportive.

The project has been lucky enough to attract a variety of donors. A range of attractive student bursaries has been developed – supported by Sir John Cass's Foundation, the Aldgate and Allhallows Barking Exhibition Foundation, the law firm Denton Wilde Sapte LLP, Man Group plc Charitable Trust, and The Noon

Foundation – to enable students to overcome financial barriers.

The Outreach and WP team have made significant inroads, attending events at local schools, colleges, community groups, libraries and shopping centres to spread the word. The team will soon increase to five, made possible with generous support from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the Paul Hamlyn Foundation and the Morgan Stanley International Foundation.

Birkbeck is negotiating with the London Borough of Newham to acquire a site for a new building in the cultural quarter of Stratford, large enough to host a range of partners and joint activities to boost education provision in east London.

Professor Philip Dewe, Vice-Master of Birkbeck and Birkbeck Stratford project leader, says: "The success of the Stratford project is a tribute to the many Birkbeck staff who have contributed so much to make the dream an impressive reality."

Above: A prospective student at Birkbeck Stratford's inaugural Open Evening (Jon Moore)

Reflections upon a changing climate

Government funding given to research on managing the risk of flooding



Birkbeck has won funding from the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council, the UK government's leading agency for research in engineering and the physical sciences, for a flood risk PhD which started in October 2007.

Following the devastating floods in parts of the UK last year this field of research is highly relevant in today's uncertain environment. The supervision for the PhD is jointly shared between Dr Diane Horn, School of Geography, and insurance risk experts Willis Analytics. The research focuses on providing improved analysis of the possible frequency and severity of insured flood losses in the Thames Gateway.

Dr Horn says: "The Thames Gateway is an ideal case study site, as it is geographically contained, with a clear and defined risk and the potential for large losses in the future. According to the

Government's Communities Plan, 160,000 new homes will be built in the Thames Gateway area by 2016 and this research will help to inform current approaches to flood risk management."

Concern about flooding and the management of flood risk in the Thames Gateway has increased in recent years due to the location of insured assets in flood risk areas and the possibility of increasing losses. In particular, the insurance industry requires detailed information about the impact of catastrophic floods, the potential risk to the Thames Gateway and how planning strategies will affect future insurance vulnerability.

Matthew Foote from Willis Analytics says: "The research project represents an innovative approach to applying analytical techniques for insurance risk assessment of future flooding in the Thames Gateway."

Above: Flooding reaches critical levels in Gloucester during July 2007 (Getty Images)

Military history prize

Dr Eckard Michels has been awarded the Werner-Hahlweg-Prize for Military History 2008 for his forthcoming biography of German colonial officer Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck, who commanded the German forces in East Africa in the First World War.

The prize, for outstanding research in military history covering all periods and countries, is presented every other year by the German Federal Office for Arms and Armament, part of the German army. The award ceremony takes place at the University of Potsdam on 28 May.

Dr Michels, the Philip Brady Lecturer in Modern German Studies, submitted his manuscript after nine years of research in more than 20 archives in Germany and Britain. "I always wanted to write a biography because it is considered the most rewarding genre," he says. "I wanted to combine recent trends in historiography with a renewed interest in Germany's colonial history and the role of the Prussian aristocracy." His close examination of the East African Campaign shows that it was not, as is sometimes alleged, a chivalrous war, but instead constituted a humanitarian catastrophe for the African civilian populations of Tanzania and Mozambique. Lettow-Vorbeck's forces enslaved hundreds of thousands of Africans, of which tens of thousands died of exhaustion and disease.

The book, *Ein preussischer Kolonialoffizier: Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck (1870-1964) Eine Biographie*, is published in mid-2008 by German publisher Schöningh

Babylab speaks up

Funding for national autism network

The Babylab team was invited to a reception at Number 10 in honour of the Autism Speaks charity, hosted by Sarah Brown, the Prime Minister's wife, last autumn.

Autism Speaks awarded the researchers a £450,000 grant over five years, raised from charities including The Henry Smith Charity and The Baily Thomas Charitable Fund. This funding is to help establish a national network for the study of baby siblings of children with autism.

Babylab co-ordinator Leslie Tucker explains: "We are investigating whether there are differences in development between infants who have siblings with autism and those who do not. This may help identify the early signs of the disorder, allowing for earlier, more effective intervention aimed at improving the quality of life for those who are affected. Creating a national network is important in bringing together researchers with common aims and advancing scientific discoveries in this area."

Leslie took the opportunity at the reception to explain the work of the Babylab (aka the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development) to Gordon Brown, at the reception, which took place on 11 September. "He was very receptive and seemed enthusiastic about our work," she says. Some 250 children are being studied at 6-12 months and again at 2-3 years for the Babylab's Baby Siblings project, led by Director, Professor Mark Johnson.

The Chair of Trustees of Autism Speaks, Dame Stephanie Shirley, is a Fellow and alumna of Birkbeck. A highly successful business career has enabled her to put into practice her conviction that business should give something back to society.

Having arrived in Britain as an unaccompanied child refugee from Germany in 1939, Dame Stephanie



started what is now the business technology group Xansa on her dining-room table with £6 in 1962. After 25 years as Chief Executive, she retired as honorary Life President in 1993. Whilst many corporate Boards beckoned, her focus has increasingly been philanthropy in the arena of autism (her autistic son Giles died age 35 in 1998).

She has founded a number of autism charities including Autism Speaks in the UK. She says: "All our efforts are directed at determining the causes of autism by 2014 and halving the total cost of it by 2020. Birkbeck's Babylab will be critical to this over the next three years."

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If you would like your baby to take part in a Babylab study, call 020 7631 6258 or email babylab@bbk.ac.uk, including contact details and your baby's date of birth/due date

Above: In Downing Street (from l-r) Babylab Director, Professor Mark Johnson, Centre Co-ordinator Leslie Tucker and Research Fellow, Mayada Elsabbagh

Policy expert on career paths

Higher education policy expert, Professor Claire Callender, is undertaking research exploring the career paths of students and graduates. Commissioned by the Higher Education Careers Service Unit and DIUS, this work focuses on students' career decision-making. She is directing a national study over four years of two groups of part-time undergraduates drawn from 25 institutions – including Birkbeck. "We will survey the students' employers about their attitudes to part-time study," says Professor Callender, who joined Birkbeck in January.

A second piece of research is associated with her Fulbright New Century Scholarship (07/08). For this she spent last winter term at Harvard Graduate School of Education exploring what lessons can be learned from the US for England's emerging system of student bursaries and scholarships. "The Fulbright programme has been especially exciting. It brings together 30 scholars from across the globe to focus on issues of equity and access in higher education."



Responding to change



Master's report
David S Latchman

Since the last *BBK*, we have begun teaching in Stratford east London for the first time. The Birkbeck Stratford project, described by one member of the Academic Board as 'the most ambitious project Birkbeck has undertaken in 180 years', is proving to be a resounding success.

In an area which normally has the lowest participation in higher education in London, we have over 600 enrolments on our certificate, diploma and degree programmes and many initially sceptical individuals and organisations are now clamouring to collaborate with us. Moreover, our intensive outreach and advertising campaign in east London has resulted in a 20% increase in applications from east London boroughs to study at Birkbeck in Bloomsbury on courses which are not yet being offered in Stratford. This contributed to a record level of student applications for the 2007-08 academic year, which meant that, for the first time in recent years, we fulfilled the ambitious student number targets set in discussions with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

These successes have proved to be highly important as we deal with the effects of the government's decision to instruct HEFCE not to support universities for students who are studying for equivalent or lesser qualifications (ELO) to those which they hold already. Although students who have already started their courses will not be affected, the College will not receive funding

from 2008-09 for new ELO students. Not surprisingly, for an institution committed to lifelong learning, approximately 40% of Birkbeck's students fall into the ELO category and the College could lose up to £8 million per year in funding once these proposals are fully implemented.

Since these proposals were first announced in September 2007, the College has pursued a dual approach. Firstly, we have campaigned strongly against the decision on the grounds that it will particularly affect individuals who are re-skilling to develop their careers. Moreover, since the vast majority of ELO students study part time, the loss of resources will severely affect the ability of part-time specialist institutions to respond to the government's skills agenda which will involve individuals in employment studying part time.

In our second and parallel approach we have worked with HEFCE to mitigate the effect on Birkbeck should the decision be implemented, taking advantage of the high opinion which HEFCE has of us on the basis of many of our activities, particularly the Stratford project.

In initial proposals, HEFCE announced a number of exemptions for particular subjects such as science and languages, which will benefit us, an additional amount for the part-time sector of £20 million pa, subsequently raised to £30 million pa, and a pledge to review annually the list of exempted subjects. Moreover, they also proposed that, at least until 2010-2011, institutions would be safety netted against the full impact of the ELO proposals and their grant would be maintained at the same level in cash terms to that for 2007-2008.

Below: A bus travels through Stratford, bearing the Birkbeck campaign (Jon Moore)



Although these proposals are helpful, they are obviously not sufficient either for the College or for individuals who wish to study the many non-exempted subjects including computer science, management and law.

We have, therefore, campaigned intensively against the proposal and you may have seen the various briefings which we have issued either in paper form or on our website. The general effect of our campaign has been greatly to raise the profile of Birkbeck and its work. Interestingly, 211 MPs (including 86 Labour MPs) signed an Early Day Motion (EDM) calling on the government not to damage Birkbeck and the Open University (OU). The same motion was the subject of an opposition day debate in the House of Commons in which speaker after speaker from all sides of the House praised Birkbeck and its work, as did the Secretary of State, John Denham, and the Minister responsible, Bill Rammell.

We have been joined, not only by other universities but also by a disparate range of organisations, including the University and College's Union (UCU), the National Union of Students (NUS) and the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), whose Chief Executive, Richard Lambert, used his inaugural Universities UK lecture to criticise the government's proposals.

This widespread opposition resulted in the Select Committee for Innovation, Universities and Skills calling for a special inquiry into the ELQ issue. I gave evidence in the first session alongside the OU, UCU and the NUS, while the second session featured the Minister, Bill Rammell, and the Chief Executive of HEFCE, David Eastwood. The Committee apparently received 478 written submissions to its inquiry of which



“ I am confident, therefore, that the College's strategic policy will allow us to continue to flourish ”

470 were against the government's position, seven were in favour and one was uninterpretable! We now await the Committee's report.

Meanwhile, we have pursued our second approach through on-going dialogue with HEFCE. We proposed that Birkbeck should build on its successes and position itself for the post ELQ era by conducting a strategic review of how best to move forward. This review would focus on our current strengths and how to build on these; for example, by engaging more with employers and widening participation by attracting individuals to Birkbeck Bloomsbury from low participation

areas outside east London. HEFCE awarded us £200,000 to conduct this strategic review and we appointed Grant Thornton to carry it out. It is intended that the results of the strategic review will underpin a major bid to HEFCE's Strategic Development Fund (SDF) in the summer for additional student numbers and recurrent funding to recruit and retain such students. Interestingly, our approach has been widely praised by government and HEFCE with the Minister, Bill Rammell, saying that Birkbeck has been a model of how higher education institutions should respond to change.

The approach we have taken is all the more important since government and HEFCE are continuing to implement the ELQ funding proposals despite the widespread opposition. HEFCE held a consultation on how (but not whether) to implement the ELQ funding withdrawal. More importantly, John Denham, in his annual grant letter to HEFCE indicated that they should 'carefully consider' the position of the institutions most affected by the ELQ funding withdrawal in allocating new student places.

This is obviously important to us in terms of our potential bid to the HEFCE SDF for new funded places.

I am confident, therefore, that the College's strategic policy will allow us to continue to flourish and fulfil our mission of assisting working people to obtain the qualifications that are most relevant to them. This will involve working closely with employers, recruiting first-time degree students from low participation areas and finding ways to support students who wish to study for ELQ qualifications despite the withdrawal of government support to the College for such students.

Automation for the nation

School of Computer Science celebrates 50 years of technological expertise

Birkbeck's School of Computer Science and Information Systems is celebrating 50 years of teaching and research with an open day for alumni and guests on 21 May.

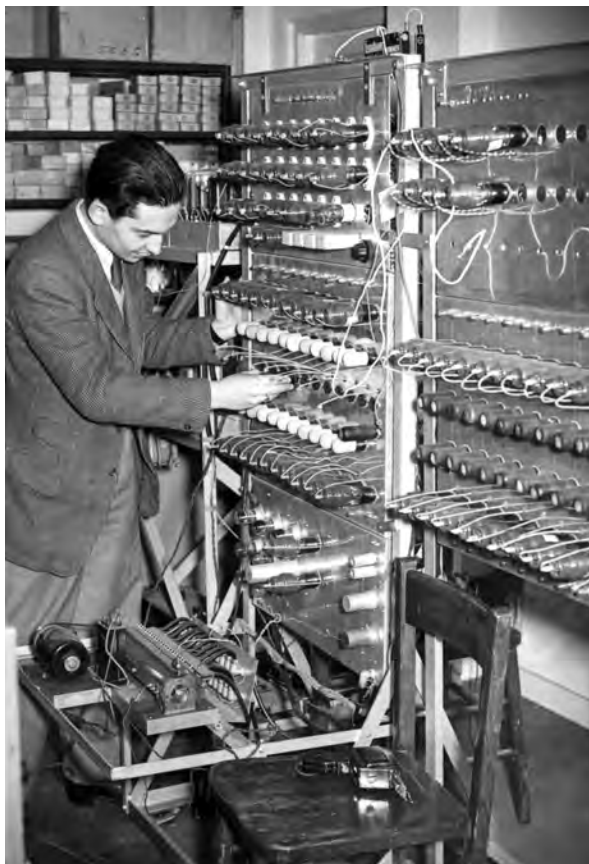
In 1957 the Birkbeck Computer Laboratory became the Department of Numerical Automation, making it one of the UK's first academic computing departments and teaching one of the first computing degrees when it launched the MSc in Numerical Automation.

The School traces its roots back to 1946 when Andrew Booth, newly appointed to JD Bernal's laboratory, began to explore the automation of the time-consuming calculations associated with the interpretation of X-ray images of crystals.

Booth's first electronic computer, SEC (Simple Electronic Computer), was completed around 1950. His best known machine, APE(X)C, was used by BTM Ltd (British Tabulating Machine Company) as the basis of the design of its HEC1 computer, which evolved into the ICT 1201. This machine was the best-selling British computer at the end of the 1950s with nearly 100 machines installed.

Booth also built the world's first rotating storage device. In the late 1940s he attempted to build a workable disc. Let down by contemporary engineering, he then succeeded in building the world's first drum store. Drum stores were widely used in the 1950s for both main memory and backing store. In addition to these innovations, Booth published an algorithm for a parallel multiplier, which still forms the basis of the multiplication circuits in a modern PC. He was also a pioneer in the use of machines to assist in the translation between languages.

In 1962 Booth left Birkbeck to pursue a distinguished academic career in Canada. Following his



50th anniversary celebrations, Wednesday 21 May

All current and former staff and students are warmly invited to attend.

To register, fill in the form at www.dcs.bbk.ac.uk/50years

2:30pm: Welcome by the Master of Birkbeck, Professor David Latchman, and the Head of School, Dr Peter Wood. This will be followed by talks from alumni about computing at Birkbeck over the past 50 years

4pm: An exhibition of research projects in the School, comprising posters and software demos

6:30pm: Talks about recent research conducted in the School

Above: One of the first graduates, Norman Kitz (MSc Engineering, 1951), working on the Simple Electronic Computer (SEC) with a very early drum in the middle of the picture

departure, the department ceased its hardware activities, which were already in decline as the costs of a hardware laboratory escalated. The work on language translation continued, together with research on numerical methods and other aspects of computer science. The department also changed its name to the Department of Computer Science.

The appointment of Professor Peter King as Head of Department in 1970 coincided with the emergence of database management technology as a major component of IT systems. King established the reputation of Birkbeck as a centre of expertise in data management and applied artificial intelligence – research themes that continue today. In 1999, following a College re-organisation, the department became the School of Computer Science and Information Systems.

The 1990s and 2000s have seen a growth of research in intelligent data analysis, bioinformatics and web technologies, in co-operation with a number of major external organisations, as well as with colleagues in neighbouring institutions. Of particular note are the current partnerships with UCL in the area of bioinformatics and with the Institute of Education at the London Knowledge Lab – which is exploring the future of learning with digital technologies.

Today the School continues as a leading centre of expertise in information and knowledge management, web technologies, computational intelligence, and bioinformatics and information systems development.



Dr Roger Johnson, Dean of Social Sciences, is compiling a history of the School. He welcomes photographs and reminiscences from alumni for an online gallery. Email memories@dcs.bbk.ac.uk

Open and shut case

Law students praised by leading judge

The School of Law's mooting team recently beat both King's College London and Keble College Oxford in the national debating contest, the Essex Court Chambers English Speaking Union Mooting Competition. Entrants are required to argue hypothetical cases as if in a court of law.

In the first round, Birkbeck took on an experienced team from King's College London on 10 December, with judge Christopher Brougham QC from South Square Chambers presiding. Mr Brougham QC has been involved in many key national cases, including representing Swiss Bank following the collapse of the Robert Maxwell empire.

The Birkbeck competitors brought a case to the Court of Appeal. Mr Brougham QC not only allowed the appeal, but awarded victory to the team – comprising Brian Barron (LLB third year) and Myles Gardiner (LLB first year accelerated). The Law School's Professor Bill Bowring said the Birkbeck team was "highly

professional, well prepared at short notice, and were the clear winners. They were especially complimented on their splendid bundle of authorities."

In the second round, Suzanne Alyamani (LLB third year) joined Brian Barron to represent Birkbeck and the pair were again successful, beating Keble College Oxford before the same judge. "Mr Brougham QC said that Brian was outstanding and outshone everyone else," says Patricia Costall, the School's academic support tutor and Mooting organiser. "Suzanne is also very capable, and experienced, having represented the Birkbeck Law School in America twice. This is what impresses me about Birkbeck – the absolute quality of the people who choose to study or work here."

Round three takes the Birkbeck team to Anglia Ruskin University for a match that had to be completed by 21 March. From 64 teams at entry, Birkbeck are now in the last 16. Birkbeck's mooting enterprise is headed up by

Professor Bill Bowring, who recently judged the Jessup Moot in Moscow. The team members were trained by Philip King and Clare Dowse, both Birkbeck graduates and past mooting champions, now successfully practising barristers.

The Essex Court Chambers Mooting Competition has a tradition of attracting the very best legal brains as its judges and producing the next generation of them from its competitors. It involves knock-out rounds across the country. The semi-finals and final take place in London in June.

Meanwhile, international law firm Lovells has established links with Birkbeck. The firm is offering a range of opportunities for Birkbeck law students, including mentoring schemes, open days and work shadowing.

Finally, the School of Law was shortlisted for a prestigious Widening Participation Initiative of the Year award late last year. The prize, which recognises work by the academic support tutor and administrative team to assist students at risk of dropping out, is awarded by the *Times Higher Education* magazine and is backed by the Higher Education Funding Council for England. Sadly for Birkbeck, Napier University won, but there's always another year.

Since the launch of the School of Law's early referral scheme, the staff have seen a noticeable upturn in retention, and students who work with Patricia Costall prior to re-sits are three times more likely than others to pass. Customised support for students is organised via one-to-one tutorials, drop-ins, email and phone support, and exam workshops.

Below: (From l-r) Farah Namroz Khan, Vice-President Elect of the Law Society, Patricia Costall and Isaac Fabelurin, President Elect of the Law Society (Jon Wilson)



To find out more about Birkbeck's School of Law, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/law

Obituaries

Ellen Noonan, Jim Greaves and Sir Leslie Murphy



Ellen Noonan

Staff in the Faculty of Lifelong Learning were saddened to hear of the death of Ellen Noonan on 23 October 2007. Ellen's relationship with Birkbeck goes back to 1972, when she set up the Certificate in Student Counselling at what was then the Centre for Extra-Mural Studies, University of London. Her aim was to take psychoanalytic ideas out of the consulting room and into the workplace by training those in the 'people business', such as teachers, personnel managers, social workers and nurses.

This very successful course laid the foundation for the MSc in Psychodynamic Counselling, set up in 1994, which has now moved to the School of Psychology. Counselling courses continue to be taught in the Faculty of Lifelong

Above: Ellen Noonan
(with thanks to Paul Terry)

Learning, attracting around 400 students each year.

Ellen helped establish the Birkbeck Counselling Association, which runs annual conferences and a monthly forum, and publishes the highly successful journal *Psychodynamic Practice* (Routledge). She became consultant editor and was a pivotal member of the editorial team.

A charismatic leader, her vision and determination were vital in sustaining her courses. However, she was not the kind of person who demanded that people think the same way she did.

Ellen could be called a charismatic leader, in that her drive, vision and determination were vital in establishing and sustaining the counselling courses which she founded. However, reflecting something about the culture of Birkbeck, she was not the kind of inspiring figure who demanded that her colleagues and students think like she did. On the contrary, she took great pleasure in helping others to develop their own ways of thinking. Characteristically, her own highly influential and sharply observed book, *Counselling Young People*, was not required reading for her students. She was much more interested in helping her students, and teaching colleagues, free themselves from their own inhibitions and fear of learning rather than indoctrinating them with her own ideas.

Ellen retired from Birkbeck in 1999. She continued private consultancy, her work for the journal, developed new interests and activities, and played an active part in the life of the Birkbeck Counselling Association. She will be greatly missed by her colleagues and students.

**Dr Laurence Spurling
and Paul Terry**

Jim Greaves

Jim Greaves (BSc Psychology 1966), who died in April 2007, was President of the Students' Union and Student Governor between 1965-67, at a critical time for Birkbeck. The management was seriously considering implementing government policy to substantially expand the number of full-time undergraduate places. This would have meant the end of the key role of Birkbeck as a college for mature students. Jim led the students in a vigorous campaign against this, with many academic staff, and defeated the proposals. As a result, the traditional role of Birkbeck was confirmed and strengthened.

Jim had to leave school aged 16 because of family circumstances, but was given a wonderful opportunity to develop his intellectual and professional life at Birkbeck. He went on to a career at the University of Glamorgan. He is survived by his wife Kathleen, whom he met at Birkbeck, and a daughter Claire. He will be remembered with great affection by the graduates who campaigned with him, many of whom had remained close friends.

**Kathleen Greaves
(BA History, 1966)**

Sir Leslie Murphy

Sir Leslie Murphy, who died on 29 September aged 91, was an oil executive who became the last Labour-appointed chairman of the National Enterprise Board. He was also a founder-trustee of the SDP.

Sir Leslie worked in the civil service while taking evening classes in Mathematics at Birkbeck, becoming the first external student to achieve a first-class degree. He was made a College Fellow in 1978.

Waste not want not

Environmental Management graduate, Mark Gough, on not taking no for an answer

While working towards his MSc in Environmental Management at Birkbeck, Mark Gough was promoted from a part-time research position at publishing company Reed Elsevier to become its Environment and Health and Safety Co-ordinator, responsible for developing and co-ordinating the company's initiatives and policies.

Mark was previously an actor (appearing in BBC film *The Student Prince*, the remake of *The Liver Birds* and in several plays). However, he came to a point where he wanted to focus on his passion for the environment.

"When Reed Elsevier stopped recycling I started carrying waste to the local recycling centre on my way home from work. The management saw me leaving the building with a large white sack and pulled me in. I explained how important recycling was – quoting what I'd learned in my Birkbeck lectures – but was told there was no budget. Not willing to take no for an answer, I took a proposal back to the company, outlining low cost recycling options," Mark continues. The business unit he was working for asked him to talk to its head office about what more the company could do. Ultimately this led him to the group's global head office, where he proposed they should hire an Environmental Co-ordinator to organise the company's approach to the environment. "They offered me the job and the rest is history."

Mark set up regular meetings to discuss further improvements with his colleagues. "I now run a network of 86 similar 'gREen teams' for Reed Elsevier in many countries." His dissertation also lead to ongoing consultancy work for Birkbeck. He helped establish the College's own Environmental Management Group, which is



responsible for ensuring compliance with the environmental/sustainability policy statement agreed by the governors and signed by the Master. "The EMS Group is having some success," says Mark, "and there has been a six-fold increase in the amount of waste recycled by the College."



For updates on Birkbeck's environmental progress go to the College Green website at www.bbk.ac.uk/sustain. If your company or organisation would like to contact Mark Gough through Birkbeck's Business Relations Unit, call 020 7631 6593 or email employers@bbk.ac.uk

Master and Sir

Professor Sir Timothy O'Shea BSc PhD FRSE, who was Master of Birkbeck from 1997 until 2002, was awarded a Knighthood in the Queen's 2008 New Year's Honours List in recognition of his services to higher education.

Professor O'Shea graduated in Mathematics and Experimental Psychology from Sussex and has a PhD in Computer Science from Leeds. He joined the Open University in 1978, his research centring on the educational applications of computers. Awarded a Personal Chair by the OU in 1987, he became a Pro-Vice-Chancellor in 1994.

While Master of Birkbeck he was also Provost of Gresham College (2000) and Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of London (2001), all held concurrently. He became Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of Edinburgh in October 2002.





FIRST CLASS MALE

Talk of essays and seminars rules the Prego household

Left: Jose Prego, in Birkbeck's post room (Christina Panagi)

Jose Prego, 31, graduated last year from Birkbeck with BA History of Art and hopes to carry on his studies at the College. His sister is studying BA German at Birkbeck, and aims to complete this year, and his wife, Fiona, is a Birkbeck Stratford student on the Introduction to Counselling course.

"I found out about Birkbeck through my sister, Elisabete," says Jose, who was an office assistant at Windmill Organics when he enrolled on his BA. He is now a general office assistant in the post room at Birkbeck. Originally from Portugal, Jose came to England to continue his studies.

"I studied fine art in Portugal in secondary school and I was always interested in art theory but when I finished secondary school there wasn't much happening. So I came to London when I was 20 with my sister because I wanted something different – a new challenge. After 11 years we are still here. I remember the day I received the letter that I had been accepted at Birkbeck. I was really happy."

Jose soon got the hang of juggling work and study because he had worked part-time as a student in Portugal. "It was very hectic but if you are doing something you really love, you make time," he says. "I tried to do a bit every day, even if it was just one hour. If you get into a rhythm, you find it easier. When you have to do an essay it's really stressful, I cannot deny that. I must say, I did struggle with them in the beginning because I didn't do much essay writing in Portugal. Now it is

something that I really enjoy. I saw my wife doing an essay and I thought 'I really miss this!' It might sound crazy but it's true. I really enjoy the learning process."

Jose's wife is a dentist and is using the Birkbeck Stratford counselling course as a springboard possibly to change career.

Says Jose: "Fiona enjoys her job but she is thinking about the future because being a dentist is very demanding physically for your back and neck. There are a few people she knows, including her boss, who have had operations because of their work."

He adds: "She is really loving her counselling course; it's an area she is very interested in. I give her tips to encourage her and tell her to do her reading but I can't say too much because I was not the perfect student! There are things I would have liked to do differently but the main thing I'd advise people is to just enjoy it. It opens your mind and gives you different perceptions. It helps you on a personal level too. Fiona has to submit an essay this week on listening; she was never a good listener but now she is actually becoming good," he laughs.

In the future Jose hopes to get his teeth into his favourite subject areas of dance, photography and film. He is also excited about his sister's success. She is working for an arts performance agency that specialises in opera singing. "Most of the singers are from Germany so she can practice the language," he says.

Jose is looking forward to seeing his sister graduate this November. "My graduation day was brilliant so I'm really looking forward to it."



STANDING TALL

It's been more than 25 years since Bill West was in a classroom, so he was understandably nervous about his first lectures at Birkbeck Stratford. "I was pretty apprehensive but the lecturers are friendly and approachable."

Bill (42) is taking a foundation year Certificate in Life Sciences, and works as a laboratory manager for TDG Chemicals at the Port of London. He receives financial support from his employer, which pays for his tuition fees.

"Everyone at work has been very supportive, particularly my managers. They encouraged me to take the course as part of my recent promotion. At first it was hard to adjust, starting a new position at work and beginning the course. Juggling everything took a couple of weeks to work out, but now I'm in a routine, things are going really well. I use my lunch hour to catch up on my study, and go straight to lectures after work. Learning in the evening means I don't have to give up work so I don't have to worry about paying the mortgage and I can fit my studies around my home life."

Left: Bill West at work in Dagenham (Jon Moore)

Community spirit

Latest developments in the Development and Alumni team

Your team

Since the last edition of *BBK* the Development and Alumni team has been working hard to raise funds for the Alumni Fund, new staff posts, the Birkbeck Stratford project, as well as to stay in touch with you, our alumni community. The team has expanded significantly since 2006, and we have been able to increase our fundraising potential as well as improve upon the services we offer our alumni and friends.

£1+ million raised

We are particularly pleased to have raised over £1 million in funding for Birkbeck, thanks to the generosity of you, our alumni, a number of charitable trusts and foundations, and through the corporate social responsibility programmes of some

of the country's leading businesses.

Over 300 students have received financial support through bursaries or scholarships in the last year, a number of whom have enrolled at Birkbeck Stratford. The generosity of our alumni and friends has been invaluable. Thanks to all of you who gave your support in the last year.

Alumni relations

Last autumn we launched the new version of the alumni E-newsletter, *E-bbk*, to keep you informed of events, news and achievements at Birkbeck. Feedback has been positive. We are also lucky to have the support of 35 alumni who frequently volunteer at Open Evenings to talk to prospective students and act as Birkbeck ambassadors.

Telephone campaign 2008

In February 2008 we held our third telephone campaign to raise money for the Alumni Fund. Thank you to all those who participated; for your time, suggestions, comments and donations. It is wonderful that so many of our alumni and friends take the opportunity to support Birkbeck by donating money towards bursaries for students who would not otherwise be able to study at the College, as well as through grants for projects in and around Birkbeck where the need is greatest. We will publish the results of our fundraising efforts in the next issue of *BBK* magazine, but do look out for them in the next E-newsletter too. If you do not subscribe to the E-newsletter and would like to, please get in touch and we will add you to the list.

If you would like to assist us by volunteering at Open Evenings, contributing to the Alumni Fund or if you'd simply like more information about the activities and benefits offered by the Development and Alumni Office, please email us at alumni@bbk.ac.uk

No excuses

The Mayor of Tower Hamlets asks the big questions in life

Councillor Ann Jackson, Mayor of Tower Hamlets, is a third-year BA Philosophy student at Birkbeck. She very much welcomes the College bringing its specialist part-time evening teaching provision to east London.

"There are no excuses anymore. Anybody who wishes to study now has the opportunity to attend classes on their doorstep. I hope Tower Hamlets residents see Birkbeck Stratford as a way to access the job market," says Ann, who helped launch Birkbeck Stratford at the Old Town Hall last spring when she was Deputy Mayor of Tower Hamlets.

"The Borough currently has a high unemployment rate – double the national rate. However, we also have innovative and dynamic companies in the area, which are great employers. I hope people will enrol on courses that give them the qualifications they need in the job market, as well as stimulate their interests and give them the self belief and motivation to achieve more."

Ann left school early but has always been an avid reader who is curious about life, culture and political systems.

"I always wanted to study philosophy. I enjoy asking the big questions, such as, why are we here? How can different groups live together? How do political systems develop?"

Her daughter, Maryann, who enrolled at Birkbeck first, showed Ann the College prospectus and encouraged her to enrol. Maryann is now in her final year of the BSc in Biological Sciences.

Ann says: "When I read the prospectus I said yes – this is for me. I am really surprised to find myself enjoying things I thought I never would."

She is also finding that her time

Birkbeck Stratford offers flexible, evening courses in east London, which has the lowest higher education participation levels in the London region. This ground-breaking project extends higher education into the heart of the 'hard to reach' communities by using Birkbeck's expertise to develop part-time, evening, undergraduate degrees offered locally in east London, meeting the needs of employers and individuals. To find out more about the courses offered at Birkbeck Stratford, visit www.birkbeckstratford.ac.uk. For more details about the BA Philosophy at the Bloomsbury campus, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/phil

at Birkbeck is helping her in her work: "At Birkbeck you learn to manage your time better. I have a busy schedule and sometimes Council engagements clash so I do miss the odd lecture, but lectures are backed up with discussion groups so you can always catch up there. I feel more confident and focused when joining debates. I think I ask better questions."

She adds: "I'm a politician so my degree is giving me more insight into how political ideologies are formed and why we have the systems we have today. I'm also a humanitarian and I do really want to help people to have a better understanding of each other and to be more tolerant."

Below: Councillor Ann Jackson



PhD on the brain

Przemek Tomalski on life in a world-class lab

Przemek Tomalski came to Birkbeck from Poland in 2005 to commence his full-time PhD Psychology research into cognitive and brain development. He was lucky enough to receive a Marie Curie Early Stage Training Fellowship from the European Union.

“Birkbeck was definitely top of my list,” he says. “I was attracted to the College because of its excellence in research. The team at the Centre for Brain and Cognitive Development (aka the Babylab), where I’m based, is famous for its work.”

“My research is aimed at investigating the brain mechanisms involved in processing visual information about faces. I look at neural pathways that are active in the human brain from birth through to adulthood that allow the rapid detection of faces. Apart from the stimulating atmosphere, I benefit from impressive research facilities and equipment, all located in central London.”

He continues: “Birkbeck is not just a place where you can do world-class research. It is also a place where you can discover that working towards your PhD is not just three years of hard work, but also three years of fun and sharing your passion with others.”

When Przemek completes his PhD he plans to continue as a researcher of cognitive neuroscience. “The next step is to find a suitable laboratory to gain more experience as a post-doctoral fellow. Eventually, I might be able to get a position as a group leader and start my own laboratory.”

For those thinking about following in his footsteps, Przemek says it’s vital to identify an area of investigation that you find exciting and important to explore. “Then you can look around and find a relevant supervisor that you would be happy to work with.”



Above: Przemek Tomalski (Birkbeck Photo Unit)

Labour of love

Graduation must have seemed like a distant dream when Genet Amare went into labour during her final Law exam last year. However, six months after the birth of her daughter, Eldana Michael, Genet was able to enjoy her graduation ceremony in November.

“Graduation day was a day filled with pride. Pride in being part of such a memorable ceremony,” she says. “I felt proud of all my achievements as an employee, student and mother. This is what Birkbeck does best. It facilitates and enables you to realise your full capacity without having to make any compromises.”

“Everybody at Birkbeck has been really supportive. Had it not been for the staff in the Law School, I would not have been able to sit my exam, let alone graduate with a 2:1.”

Genet (31) enrolled on a degree shortly after leaving school, but found it wasn’t right for her. But 10 years later, when she decided to become a solicitor, she came to Birkbeck because she needed the flexibility offered by its part-time, evening teaching. “I’m going to be a family law solicitor. Not only has my experience at Birkbeck made me more confident, but it has added another dimension both to me and my family.”



Above: Genet Amare with daughter Eldana at her graduation ceremony in November (Jon Wilson)

Thank you for supporting the Alumni Fund



The Birkbeck Alumni Fund was set up to provide additional help to those students who are unable to cover the full cost of their course and to ensure Birkbeck continues to provide a vibrant learning environment for its students.

To date 1,900 alumni have donated to the Fund and helped raise over £200,000. Their generosity has been essential in helping students with expenses such as childcare, travel costs, books etc, and made it possible for many to continue with their studies and achieve their goals.

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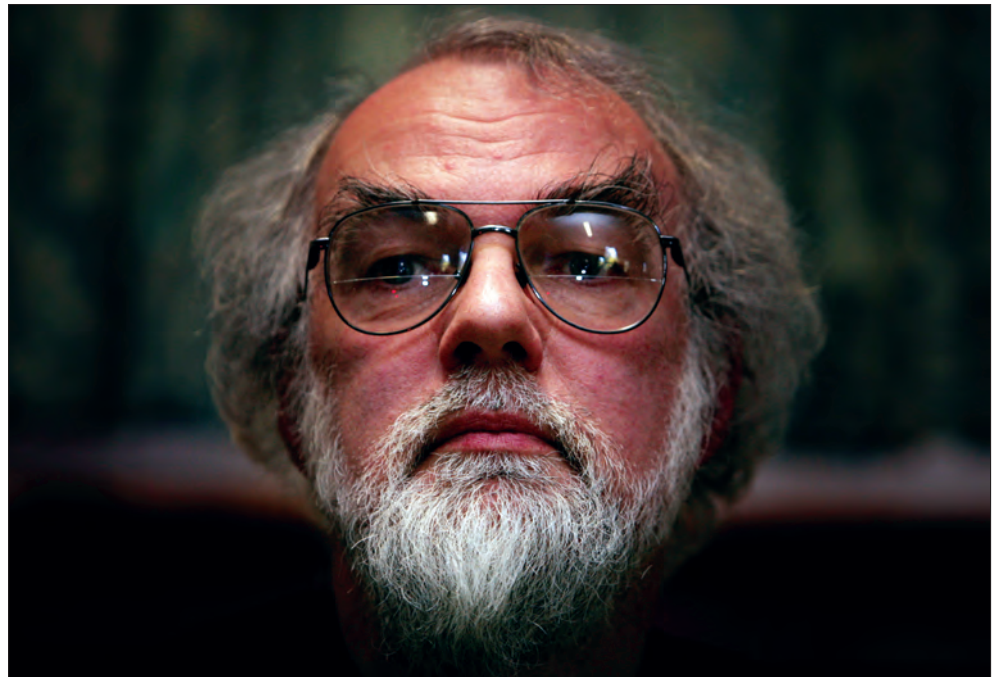
A law unto themselves

Critics should welcome Rowan Williams' courageous attempt to offer a constructive vision of British society, writes Gordon Lynch

History will almost certainly judge Rowan Williams, the Archbishop of Canterbury, more kindly than many of his recent critics have done. Like many other societies across the world, one of the key challenges facing Britain in the twenty-first century is a re-negotiation of the place of religion in public life. One possibility, encouraged by the rising voices of the new atheism, is to move towards a more thoroughly secularist state, in which the Church of England is disestablished, religious groups have little or no recognised role in public structures, and religion is firmly confined to the private faith and conscience of the individual believer. Another alternative, arguably more in keeping with the British tradition of toleratance, is to recognise a place for religion in public life within the wider context of legal and political structures that promote the common good for people of every or no faith.

Williams' original speech at the Royal Courts of Justice offered a sophisticated vision of that latter approach, arguing for a legal system which recognises that people may be members of liberal, democratic society whilst also being members of faith communities with their own moral traditions.

Such recognition of people's 'multiple affiliations' offers a model of society which respects social identifications other than the state, but which does not allow these identifications to over-ride basic principles of human freedom and dignity enshrined in the principles of liberal democracy. Williams' vision represents an evolution of the British tradition of toleration, framed by a common commitment to notions of human dignity, which both have their origins in religious traditions, and should also be used to critique the way in which religious traditions



operate in the modern world.

Whether secularism or Williams' vision of toleration wins the day is something that we will discover in the coming decades, but we should welcome his courageous attempt to offer a constructive vision of British society that goes beyond a special pleading for his own faith community to a more generous and inclusive vision for society.

One lesson from the furore is that we need to have a higher regard for the power of human agency to effect positive cultural change. Too much of the debate around Rowan Williams' comments seems to assume that we live in a world of immutable, unchangeable realities.

Some people believe that British identity is fixed and can't adapt – and that anyone who can't fit into this should 'go back to where they came from'. Others believe that sharia law, and Islamic thinking generally, are fixed and incapable of adapting to core modern values of equality and human rights. Yet


Above: Rowan Williams, who defended his remarks, but took responsibility for any "misleading choice of words" (Reuters)

others seem to believe that the way in which the news media works is an inevitable given, over which media professionals have little power or moral responsibility, and that public debate has to be determined by media forms rather than the other way around. But all of these things are capable of change. We know that national identities, religious traditions and media usage can all shift and adapt in the face of new cultural contexts and challenges. Our capacity for adaptation will determine the kind of society our children will inherit.

Our challenge is to think about what responsibility we have in shaping the political, religious and media landscape that we inhabit, and as Rowan Williams would exhort us, to find a way of building a fair and peaceful society.



Gordon Lynch is Professor in Sociology of Religion in the Faculty of Lifelong Learning, exploring interactions between religion, media and popular culture.



Dr Jane Nicklin jumped at the chance of being a consultant microbiologist on *How Clean is Your House?* Just don't expect her to do any cleaning

A LIFE OF GRIME

Mould expert Dr Jane Nicklin has made such a name for herself that Channel Four thought she was the natural choice to help them produce their hit show, *How Clean is Your House?* She answered their call and became their consultant microbiologist for the popular TV series. Based in the School of Biological and Chemical Sciences, she specialises in mycology, the science of moulds, and her lab is one of the few in the UK with expertise in this area.

How Clean is Your House?, hosted by cleaning professionals Kim Woodburn and Aggie Mackenzie, recently screened its fifth series. The production team brought in Jane on the latest series to analyse swabs taken from kitchen sinks, chopping boards and dish cloths from houses in dire need of tender loving care. The programme aims to 'revolutionise the dull world of housework' by providing tips that used to be passed down through the generations, as well as labour-saving, cost-cutting trade secrets of professional cleaners.

Jane studied the samples at her Birkbeck laboratory and told the production team what she'd discovered. "People in this field have got a saying that 'everything is everywhere'. So if you look for a particular bug, you will find it. Usually though, we find that the toilet is the cleanest part of the house because everyone flails bleach around the place. In almost all the houses on the show we routinely picked up human pathogens such as Salmonella and E-coli. You could find them if you looked for them, which I think shocked the householders quite badly, but for us it wasn't a surprise."

Once Jane had completed her lab work she was asked to go on location during

filming as consultant.

"While Aggie was speaking to camera I'd be hiding on the set behind a dirty sofa or underneath an old car. My job was to eavesdrop to make sure that what she said was sound science based on our lab results."

"I also made sure that they were getting the overall message right to the householder. We didn't want to terrify people. It's not car crash television. It's a sensible risk evaluation of the way some people live their lives. We were telling the householder, 'this is a very hazardous way of living your life. Here are some simple ways to clean up.'"

"When Aggie revealed the lab results on set I'd make sure the householder didn't get panicked, and to answer questions, so it's fairly responsible."

Was there a particular house that stuck in her mind from the series? "No, they were all beyond belief," she laughs. Does she ever get stuck into any cleaning herself? "No no no."

The College received a fee for Jane's consultancy work on the programme, which helps to finance her School's student project fund for MSc and PhD students to spend on their microbiology research projects.

Jane's TV work took off 10 years ago when she was commissioned by a documentary about cot death to see if mould on mattresses could be a risk factor. Her work helped inform the current guidelines that recommend parents use new mattresses to reduce the risk.



“In almost all the houses we routinely picked up human pathogens such as salmonella and e-coli.”



She also formed a long-running collaboration, 'Mapping the Air', with artist Rachel Chapman. This involves extracting airborne spores trapped on people's clothing and cultivating them to generate ecological 'maps'.

The pair also produced 'Breathe', a series of works exhibited in 2001 by the Wellcome Trust, the world's largest research funding organisation. To produce the exhibits, airborne spores were captured on dishes of nutrient-rich agar jelly by leaving the dishes exposed to the atmosphere for a short time. The spores soon colonised the dishes, generating a self-contained biological world that developed like a Poloroid photograph.

"Rachel came to me through the personal recommendation of a hospital technician who had done my MSc in Microbiology," she says. "We have been working together for pretty much 10 years and have had exhibits all around the world."

Jane has established several research contracts to sample airborne fungal spores and provide risk assessments and remedial strategies based on the data she generates. Past clients have included DEFRA and London Underground, and she was also contracted to analyse a private collection of works on magic that was rumoured to be haunted. The collection of Harry Price at Senate House Library comprises publications on witchcraft, the history of psychical research and hypnotism, and includes the the first account of a séance.

Luckily, Jane doesn't spook easily, and she went to investigate: "There was a conservator cataloging this collection and he developed a bad reaction with chest,

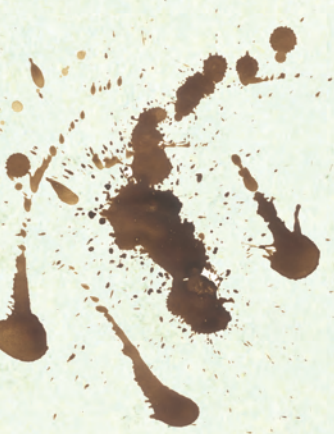
throat and eye problems. A second conservator suffered similar problems. I went in to prove that there were no airborne miasmas of biological origin! You can draw your own conclusions about what, or who, was to blame..."

Ongoing work includes analyses for a number of National Trust properties. "Since we had all that flooding last summer I've been working with the National Trust at lots of properties where moulds have become a problem – for instance Kensington Palace, Coughton Court and Throckmorton Estate. I've been analysing anything from silk wallpaper and horsehair plaster to books, clocks, all sorts of artefacts and materials. I've also conducted risk assessments for health purposes for people working in these properties."

She's also been involved in lab work for Channel Four's *Big Brother* house, again with Kim and Aggie, after the most recent housemates had been living there for several weeks. "We took samples from the communal bath and the kitchen. Areas of great concern included the dish cloth, the kitchen sink and the chopping boards. Kim and Aggie then appeared on a *Big Brother* spin-off programme to comment on what we'd found. If they ask me again I'll say yes because I enjoy it, it's good for the lab and it helps the students. I really believe in supporting the public understanding of science and this kind of work helps get science out into public domain."



For information about biological and chemical sciences courses at Birkbeck, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/prospective



The discovery of thousands of sharks' teeth reveals how Moroccan farmland was once a rich sea teeming with life. Palaeontologist **Charlie Underwood** sets the scene

OCEAN'S DELVE

Below the dusty scrub and parched farmland of northern Morocco lie the largest known reserves of mineral phosphate rock. Vast complexes of opencast mines, one stretching for nearly 30 kilometres, cut into these deposits, with a network of conveyor belts transporting the phosphate sand and rock to the processing factories turning the rock into fertiliser.

These great phosphate deposits were laid down in a sea saturated with nutrients and teeming with life. As a result, the rocks are crammed with the fossilised phosphatic bones and teeth of fish, sharks and a host of other extinct vertebrates. As the phosphate rock is dug up, fossils are exposed in their millions. Many of the better ones are collected by the mine workers, and sold on to wholesalers. Good fossils sell for good money, to the extent that the badly broken fossils are often 'improved' with skilled use of plaster. Indeed, some fossils may be little more than a mosaic of assorted bone pieces and plaster, carved to resemble a crocodile or mosasaur – an extinct marine reptile.

Away from the industrial landscapes of spoil heaps and fertiliser factories of the north of the country, fossils of similar age can be found in the more spectacular backdrop of the Atlas Mountains. Unlike the offshore and probably stagnant seas of mining areas, rocks here were deposited



Left: A tray of fossils in the warehouse of a local dealer in Morocco containing reptile and fish remains from phosphates of various ages. These include (from the top) tooth plates of rays and shark vertebrae, shark and fish teeth and crocodile plates and teeth of mosasaurs and other Cretaceous reptiles (Charlie Underwood)

in shallow coastal waters, scoured by storm waves.

Sixty eight million years ago Morocco lay on the southern margin of the great tropical ocean of Tethys, part of which would in future become the Mediterranean Sea. For millions of years this had been getting narrower as Africa and India moved northwards, changing ocean currents to force nutrient-rich waters up from the ocean floor and onto the flooded northern edge of the African continent. Within these warm and productive seas, great blooms of plankton formed the basis of a food chain, at the top of which lived the mosasaurs, monstrous sea-going monitor lizards – some species reaching over 15 metres in length. But whilst the ocean conditions that created this environment persisted for 18 million years, the mosasaurs and their contemporaries did not. The tumultuous events that occurred at the end of the Cretaceous period wiped out many of the inhabitants of these rich seas, from the plankton to the giant reptiles.

After the demise of so many of the inhabitants of the world's oceans, new animals evolved to take their place, with new groups of fish, sharks and reptiles replacing the animals of the Cretaceous. Even now, as survivors of the great Cretaceous extinction evolved into new forms during the Palaeocene period, another global upheaval was to occur. The end-Palaeocene saw one of the most dramatic rises known in global temperatures, as methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, previously trapped in the deep ocean was released into the atmosphere. During all this time, the phosphates, with their abundance of fossils, continued to be deposited, leaving an unrivalled record of the changes in marine vertebrate faunas across these two events.

Despite all of the large and spectacular fossils recovered from the phosphates, the majority of vertebrate fossils are too small to interest the dealers. Particularly abundant are the isolated teeth of sharks and their flattened relatives, the rays. Despite having a skeleton of mineralised cartilage that rarely makes it into the fossil record, sharks and rays produce and shed thousands of teeth during their life, and so leave many potential fossils behind. A bucket full of soft phosphate sediment may yield a kilo of phosphate

sand and grit when passed through a fine sieve to get rid of the finer grains. When sorted under the microscope, this could contain anything up to one thousand teeth, with maybe 20 or more species of sharks and rays present. The sheer quantity of material enables vast samples of fossil vertebrates to be collected.

When sorting through the samples, the most striking observation is how modern everything looks. Even in the Cretaceous, when the sharks shared the seas with the great marine reptiles, and pterosaurs soared overhead, many of the sharks and rays would be familiar today. The shallows were dominated by stingrays of many different types, along with medium-sized predatory sharks, members of an extinct group of sawfishes and small bamboo sharks. In more offshore waters, these were joined by a greater diversity of sharks, especially the large midwater hunters, whilst the deep and muddy seas contained additional catsharks and six gilled sharks; groups today which dominate many deep seas.

The end-Cretaceous saw the demise of several families and most shark and ray species, although a few seemed to come through the event unharmed. As gaps in ecosystems do not last for long, new groups of stingrays, sand tiger sharks, houndsharks and true sawfish all appeared very shortly after; indeed this replacement was so rapid that the newly appeared groups are often present alongside teeth of Cretaceous species, mixed together by storms and burrowing animals disturbing the sea floor. The end-Palaeocene warming seems to have changed the faunas in an unexpected way. Not only did very few species become extinct, but several saw dramatic size increases at that time. During this warm period, some teeth of the genus *Otodus* reached eight centimetres long, larger than those of a modern great white, making it probably the greatest predator of the time.

With the coming of spring, and the warmer weather making working in the garden more pleasant, spare a thought for the fossils revealed in order to make the fertiliser you are using, and the teeming seas where these nutrients were buried.



Dr Charlie Underwood is based at the School of Earth Sciences. For more information about the School, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/es

Dr Charlie Underwood is a palaeontologist at the School of Earth Sciences. He started working on fossil sharks almost by accident when a colleague showed him a few teeth he had collected whilst sampling for other fossils. "I have since carried out extensive studies of fossil sharks in the UK, and I started working in Morocco in order to obtain larger samples. This initial work has been in part-funded by a Birkbeck Faculty of Science Grant. I'm now finalising plans for an official collaboration between Birkbeck and researchers in Morocco."

Far from being what is seen as the cold economic doctrine of today, Free Trade was once a passionately held ideal that stood for democracy, justice, and peace, writes **Frank Trentmann**

Free trade nation

First came the banana, then there was coffee. Fair Trade goods, bags, and meetings have become part of our everyday life. Entire towns, like Bristol, are now 'Fair Trade cities'. Fair Trade is cool, even sexy, the pet cause of film and rock stars.

Free Trade, by contrast, is viewed as a conspiracy of rich multinationals and international organisations like the World Trade Organisation, even as the modern successor to the slave trade. At the violent anti-globalisation battles in Seattle and Genoa it was in the first line of attack.

A century ago, the battle over globalisation looked very different. Then, it was Free Trade which was popular and good. Britons rallied to its defence, in mass meetings, dramatic stage shows, and even at the seaside. In High Wycombe, Free Traders were even read the Riot Act in 1910 after smashing their opponents' offices, setting their exhibits on fire, and fighting street battles with the police.

My new book, *Free Trade Nation*, tells the story of how Free Trade became a defining part of British identity and politics – and how it lost its moral highground after the First World War. It offers a fresh look at a critical chapter in British and world history. At the same time, it provides a historical perspective on today's debate about globalisation, challenging the ways we have come to think about trade, justice, and democracy.

In writing the book I have been especially keen to put my hand on the pulse of Free Trade culture and to capture its heartbeat for readers. Liberal writers

make much of the superiority of Free Trade as an economic theory. But for people in late Victorian and Edwardian Britain it was much more than that. Free Trade stood for peace, civil society, and democracy. It was Britain's civilising mission. Bertrand Russell, in 1904, said he felt 'inclined to cut my throat' if protectionism won. What nationalism and socialism were on the continent, Free Trade was in Britain: a national ideology and mass movement.

Before the First World War, Free Trade mobilised millions of people across all classes and parts of the country, from working-class housewives to millionaires, from Winston Churchill to the anarchist prince Peter Kropotkin. One of the delights of the research was to find tucked away in Churchill's voluminous papers detailed reports of what one of the many Free Trade groups was up to. In 1910 alone, it organised over 5,000 mass meetings, masterminded by Churchill with characteristic military zeal. It even invaded sea-side resorts, pulling tourists away from ice-cream vendors and minstrel shows to debate political economy on the beaches.

This political circus drove home one key message: Free Trade meant civilisation and democracy as well as cheap goods. Supporters held up the cheap white loaf to show that Free Trade guaranteed freedom from hunger and oppression while in countries like Germany, they claimed, tariffs reduced people to eating black bread, horsemeat, and even dogs. Children and grown men paraded the streets

dressed up as the big loaf.

The book also sheds new light on the general relationship between citizenship and consumption. We tend to take it for granted that consumer culture undermines civic spirit. As Andrew Marr has recently put it in his engaging history of contemporary Britain: Britons started shopping and stopped voting.

Free Trade Nation offers an alternative story. The defence of Free Trade came after a generation of unprecedented affluence. Britain was the richest place in Europe at the time. Music halls and department stores were multiplying. The people flocked to seaside resorts, early cinemas, and the race course. Yet politics was not crowded out by shopping and entertainment. Far from it. Turnout shot up to 87% at the January 1910 election. Free Traders and Tariff Reformers feverishly adapted modern advertising, entertainment, and new technologies like film for their own use. In the process, they transformed politics, making it trendier, even sensationalist, but also enabling it to communicate big questions of politics and economy to a mass electorate. Free Traders were the first to target 'the consumer' as a public interest.

During and after the First World War, Free Trade culture disintegrated. It has been fashionable to blame its defeat on the world depression of 1929–1931. This killed it off, but as I show, Free Trade was already fading. Consumers felt it left them helpless against big multinationals and economic cycles. 'Shopping for the Empire' became the mantra of Conservative



“Free traders transformed politics, making it trendier, even sensationalist.”

housewives. Free Trade increasingly became the preserve of libertarians and economists, and even here it suffered a huge loss when John Maynard Keynes turned towards trade regulation.

This story has interesting lessons for the present. Free Trade was not just steamrolled by bad economic times and foreign nationalism. A new world view was emerging that would shape the rest of the twentieth century. Economic globalisation, former Free Traders now argued, had outpaced political globalisation. Markets had become more integrated, while politics was lagging behind, stuck in a model of the nation-state. What was needed instead were international organisations, like the League of Nations, and later the United Nations. These could defuse explosive trade rivalries, especially over oil and food. They would also give a political expression to the global concerns of the people, rather than just leaving things to merchants and markets. Here are the precursors of an idea that has recently received international attention through the best-selling writings of Joseph Stiglitz, the Noble prize winning economist.

In the book I spell out the implications for today's debate over globalisation. Political and economic writers are wrong to presume that, given the choice, people naturally flock to Free Trade. History shows the opposite. Britain was a unique case – other democracies, like the United States, were deeply protectionist. Free Trade won in the past because it went out to win the hearts and minds of the people. And here entertainment and ethics were as important as sound economics. But it also has a lesson for the majority of people who today instinctively look to Fair Trade as a solution to global problems. Fair Trade does not have a monopoly on morals. Nor are consumers just passive victims of globalisation. In an earlier era of globalisation, it was consumers who empowered Free Trade, laying some of the foundations of the world we still live in.

Professor Frank Trentmann is based at the School of History, Classics and Archaeology. He gave his inaugural lecture, *Free Trade Nation*, on 11 March. His book, of the same name, was published in February. The BBC's former Economics Editor, Evan Davis, says of the work: "This is terrific history that will inspire economists to remember their subject really can arouse passion."



Matthew Weait asks why, after more than 20 years, the criminal law is now being used against those alleged to have infected their sexual partners

Letters

John Crace's interview with Eric Hobsbawm provoked strident views amongst some readers



I can quite understand that it was difficult to be truthful about Eric Hobsbawm and his work in an article celebrating his 90th birthday and fifth anniversary as Birkbeck's President. Nevertheless, it is a historian's duty to tell the truth about an academic who has still not recanted of his slavish support for the Soviet Terror, nor his commitment to the German Democratic Republic, which in the view of most commentators was the most evil of all the Communist regimes – though North Korea and Cambodia run it close. Hobsbawm has learned nothing and forgotten nothing – only an *apologia pro vita sua* could begin to compensate for all the misjudgements and

Above: Professor Eric Hobsbawm (Eamonn McCabe)

misalliances in his academic and political life. Is he teasing us with his coy self criticism about his failure to adequately understand the importance of the USA? I would suggest he was so wrapped up in his Marxist dreams that the USA was only seen through the prism of Soviet fear and loathing.

I regard Hobsbawm as the most baleful influence upon English cultural and intellectual life. In a less forgiving nation, such as his admired Soviet Union, he would have been 'purged', stripped of all honours and condemned to the Gulag. In England he is allowed to become the Grand Old Man of the Left who yearn for the good old days when the Stasi was the role model for all police states and a Trabant car the aspiration of every worker. John Crace was right on one thing. Hobsbawm has been consistently wrong about everything. Yet Birkbeck revere him as a sage. Funny old world, innit?

WR Savage

I was surprised at how lightly John Crace treated Hobsbawm's continued support for the Communist Party after Hungary 1956. It would have been interesting to hear how the Great Man justified Stalinism to himself at that period and of course earlier. The truth about the purges was known to those like Hobsbawm who took their politics seriously.

Imagine if Hobsbawm had opted for the National Socialists instead of the Communists in the 1930s. No doubt such a position, had he taken it, would attract the kind of close interrogation that Socialist revisionists of the Left never seem to face from the fearless reporters of today's media or in academia generally.

Stephen Marks
BA English, 2002

Eric Hobsbawm replies:

John Crace must speak for himself. So far as I am concerned, my answer to Stephen Marks' questions may be found in my autobiography, *Interesting Times*. Whether it will convince him, I cannot judge. As for WR Savage, I am sorry he thinks I am 'the most baleful influence upon English cultural and intellectual life', though I am naturally flattered at being assigned so powerful a role.

On the other hand, I find it difficult to understand what the statement means, other than as an expression of passionate opposition to the views I am supposed to represent, from someone who also seems unfamiliar with my writings, or indeed with the late German Democratic Republic – which, oddly, he considers worse than North Korea and Pol Pot's Cambodia. What is my 'baleful effect'? How exactly has it been exercised, except by people choosing to read my writings and, presumably, failing to be persuaded by impassioned denunciations like those of your correspondents? Still, every historian and writer should be ready for disagreement, and I welcome its publication in *BBK* magazine.

Professor Eric Hobsbawm

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Alternatively, email c.stevens@bbk.ac.uk

Books and events

Current publications, and dates for your diary

Diary dates

Tuesday 8 April, 7pm

The uniqueness of Nazism's racial war

Birkbeck-Wiener
Library Lecture Series
Speaker: Professor Ian Kershaw
Malet Street, B33

■ *Free entry; first come, first seated*

Tuesday 8 April, 7-8.30pm

Is the Renaissance scholar dead?

A Rethink debate presented by Agora and *The Guardian*. Prof AC Grayling and Stephen Bayley v Prof Adrian Monck and Simon Woodroffe
Guardian Newsroom, Farringdon. Tickets £5.

■ *To book, visit www.agora-education.org/events*

Tuesday 15 April, 4-7.30pm

Birkbeck Postgraduate Open Evening - Bloomsbury

Royal National Hotel
To book, visit

www.bbk.ac.uk/openeve

Tuesday 22 April, 6.30-8.30pm

Andrew McKinnon (Research Fellow, Birkbeck Institute for the Humanities) in conversation with writer Frank Deasy

Malet Street, Council Room

■ *Free entry; first come, first seated; Email j.eisner@bbk.ac.uk*

Wednesday 30 April, 6.30-9pm

Book launch: Jens Andermann: *The Optic of the State: Visuality and Power in Argentina and Brazil*

with Claudio Canaparo, João Cezar de Castro Rocha and Annie Coombes
Malet Street, Council Room

■ *Free entry; first come, first seated; Email j.eisner@bbk.ac.uk*

Wednesday 7 May, 4-7.30pm

Birkbeck Open Evening - Bloomsbury

Royal National Hotel

■ *To book, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/openeve*

Saturday 10 May, 2pm

Book launch: *Raymond Williams: a Warriors' Tale* by Dai Smith

Dai Smith (Chair, Arts Council of Wales) in conversation with Professor Eric Hobsbawm
Malet Street, Room 532
Followed by book signing and buffet in the George Birkbeck bar, fourth floor

■ *For more information, email parmod.w@ntlworld.com*

Thursday 29 May, 12.30-5pm

Women in Lifelong Learning Network Seminar: Identity, power and learning

Birkbeck Institute for Lifelong Learning
Speakers: Professors Alison Fuller and Jocey Quinn

■ *Registration required, email c.seagrave@bbk.ac.uk*

Friday 30 May, 9.30am-5pm

Conference: Lifelong learning, power and social change

Birkbeck Institute for Lifelong Learning
Speakers: Professors Claire Callender, Alison Fuller and Bill Jones

■ *Payment and booking required, email c.seagrave@bbk.ac.uk*

Thursday 19 June, 10am-5pm

Social research after the cultural turn: will it survive?

With Professor Stephen Frosh,

Gordon Lynch, Les Moran, Sasha Roseneil, Lynne Segal and Karen Wells
Inaugural symposium, Birkbeck Institute for Social Research
Clare Management Centre, B01
£25 standard/£15 Birkbeck staff and students. Lunch and refreshments provided.

■ *Register at www.bbk.ac.uk/bisr or email j.eisner@bbk.ac.uk*

Thursday 26 June, 4-7.30pm

Birkbeck Open Evening - Bloomsbury

Royal National Hotel

To book, visit www.bbk.ac.uk/openeve

The SAS needs you!

The Student Ambassador Society (SAS) would like to hear from Birkbeck graduates who would be willing to share their experiences of Birkbeck and a little of their time. The SAS is on the look-out for additional members to offer new Birkbeck students in Bloomsbury advice and assistance.

At the beginning of term and particularly at the start of the academic year, as well as throughout each term, the SAS aims to act as a point of reference for new students, especially those who are new to London and/or the UK, and offer meet-up sessions and campus tours.

The SAS recently received significant funding from the Birkbeck College Students' Union, but desperately needs more members to turn their plans into action. For details, email Jenny Quamina at fquam02@students.bbk.ac.uk

Books

What is Medieval History?

John Arnold
Polity Press (February 2008)

JOHN H. ARNOLD

What is Medieval History?



Death Rites and Rights

Edited by Belinda Brooks-Gordon et al
Hart Publishing (November 2007)

Conceiving Life: Reproductive Politics and the Law in Contemporary Italy

Patrick Hanafin
Ashgate (December 2007)

Free Trade Nation: Commerce, Consumption, and Civil Society in Modern Britain

Frank Trentmann
Oxford University Press (February 2008)

Intimacy and Responsibility: the Criminalization of HIV Transmission

Matthew Weait
Routledge Cavendish (December 2007)

Violence

Slavoj Žižek
Profile Books (January 2008)

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